

Epiphany 4 – February 1, 2015  
Text: Deuteronomy 18:15-20  
Theme: "So How Do You Know?"

**When you call a carpenter, you expect to get someone who knows something about building things with wood. I would be very cautious about using a carpenter who held up a nail and asked me what that nifty thingymabobber was. None of us would go to a mechanic who pointed at the battery and asked us if we knew how to detach that whatchmacallit. But let any Joe Schmo on the street start talking about religion and there will be someone who will listen to him and probably give him money. This is not new. One the founding pastors of the Missouri Synod wrote a letter to the churches in Germany in the 1800's bemoaning the itinerate preachers who were leading Lutherans astray with their dime store gospel. The thing now is to get your ordination online by paying about \$10 and filling out a form and then you can go about calling yourself clergy and doing all the work of clergy. Not only is online ordination offensive to those of us who studied many years past high school in order to be conferred the honor of ordination, but it creates the idea that religion is 100% subjective. Whatever you want to teach or believe is fine and no one needs to be accredited by any governing authority. We would never allow a doctor to operate on a person without the proper licensing and accreditation, but we will**

**allow Joe Schmo to operate on a soul. What is more important body or soul? You can only physically die once. But eternal death is far worse.**

**God started warning us 3500 years ago that there would be people who would go about and say whatever they wanted and there would be people with itching ears who would follow them. Of course, we well educated, worldly Lutherans tended to think that people were too intelligent to be taken in by charlatans selling their own version of salvation but people like Jim Baker, Jimmy Swaggert and good old Joel Osteen have proven us quite wrong. P.T. Barnum said it. "There's a sucker born every minute." He was right and while I don't really care if people pay \$19 to see a two headed snake or a bearded lady, I do care if people believe a false gospel.**

**But how do you know? There's the important question. If you are not a Biblical scholar, able to translate the Word of God from the original languages, how do you know who to believe? The people were amazed at Jesus. They knew he was a rabbi but he did things no other rabbi could do. He commanded a demon to come out of the possessed man and the demon obeyed! Jesus has demonstrated his authority over demons, illness, storms and even death. Joel Osteen can't do that. Neither can Rick Warren. But here is the tricky part. You have to know what Jesus says before you can spot falsehood.**

**False teachers and well-meaning fools flood the marketplace with easy to read books and pamphlets and snazzy platitudes. Everything they say is easy to hear, easy to digest and easy to remember. It all goes down easy. We feel good about it and it almost always makes us feel good about ourselves but, best case scenario, easy, feel good platitudes do not nourish us and worst case? It is rotten and it poisons our souls. Easy is not good. It is empty and sometimes false.**

**The Bible is not easy. It is hard. It is hard to read. It requires study and reflection. But as they say in the exercise industry – no pain no gain. How's doing that tilt back exercise in the recliner and pressing the remote control button doing for you with regard to your fitness plan? How's that diet where you eat as much junk food and drink as much pop as you want doing for your health? You and I both know that nothing worthwhile is easy. That is something we are supposed to figure out as we grow older but sometimes I think this nation is stuck in eternal adolescence with regard to religion.**

**Jesus has kept every promise God ever made. It is so obvious that he is the Messiah that you have to work to prove he is not. Don't be fooled by modern day false prophets who try to pull you away from Bible reading and Bible Study to read their silly self-help books. The only people they're really helping is themselves. Don't**

**be fooled into believing that religion is all subjective and whatever you want to believe is fine as long as it works for you. That's a fools dream. Jesus Christ is very specific about what is true and what is a lie straight from Hell. Salvation may be found in Jesus Christ and no one else. But how do you know? How do you really know for sure what is right and what is a lie?**

**First, study the Word of God. Then listen for the preacher who says what Christ said and ONLY what Christ said. The pulpit is not the place for editorial. Everyone has an opinion and mine is no more valid than yours but the Word of God is more valid than any opinion. How do you know? You know when what you hear from the pulpit is pure, unadulterated, objective Word of God. King David wrote in Psalm 32,**

**"You are a hiding place for me you preserve me from trouble; you surround me with shouts of deliverance." He wrote this because he believed that God would never forsake him or abandon him no matter what his enemies threatened; no matter what evil pursued him. God's Word was his fortress and his strength.**

**Moses worried for his people. How would they know what to do or where to go once he was gone and God promised this.**

**"I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to**

**them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.**

**But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.” God is very serious about his prophets first knowing his word and then proclaiming only his word.**

**So how do you know? When you go to a Bible study or pick up the Reader’s Digest or hear a co-worker holding forth on some matter of religion, how do you know? It is a life time pursuit to know for sure. It requires years of study, mastery of ancient languages and the reading of many books. That is why God created the Pastoral office. That is why the Holy Catholic Church deemed it necessary to train men who pursued this office for many years before they were turned loose on the people of God. Although no human system is perfect, you trust the man who has been called to be your pastor for two reasons. One he has been adequately trained and ordained by the Holy Catholic Church for the Office of the Holy Ministry and two, because God has promised to speak through his faithful prophets. As Jesus spoke with authority, so the ones whom he has called to shepherd his flock speak with authority. And that is how you know.**